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ABSTRACT

This paper describes briefly general characteristics of the higher educational system in Poland and in Eastern Europe with emphasis on the features and characteristic elements that determine the organization and goals of higher education. Discussion also includes the functions, goals, and tasks of higher education; access to higher education; the system of adult education; the professoriate; and management and administration. (MJM)

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Higher Education in Eastern Europe

Jan Szczepanski

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FOREWORD

Jan Szczepanski is a leading sociologist and educator of Eastern Europe–indeed of all Europe. He is the author of the recent massive *Index of Education in Poland*, a former President of the International Sociological Association, and a frequent lecturer in other countries of the world.

In a recent seminar sponsored by the ICED and the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, Professor Szczepanski made a most valuable presentation which was recorded and subsequently edited. It is of such general interest that it is now made available to a wider audience through the ICED Occasional Papers series.

I strongly recommend the most careful attention to Professor Szczepanski's perceptive comments.

James A. Perkins
Chairman
International Council for
Educational Development

Higher Education in Eastern Europe

To begin, I would like to say that as a sociologist I am fully aware that words have a different sociocultural meaning in different social contexts, and that it is very difficult to perceive them in the frame of references that we are used to. I just want to stress this in order to avoid misunderstandings. Although I know that misunderstandings are inevitable, I would like to try to reduce them to the necessary minimum.

Now I would like to present some general characteristics of the higher educational system in Poland and in Eastern Europe. In order to do it I have to begin with some information about the structure and the social context in which this higher educational system functions. To me it is self-evident that one can understand the structure and the functioning of higher educational systems only in the context of the society that creates this system of higher education, its economic and political structure as well as its cultural and value systems.

So first let me describe briefly East European societies and the features and characteristic elements which determine the organization and goals of higher education.

I would like to stress first that East European societies are political societies. By political societies we mean those whose political aims, political and ideological values, and political targets of their Communist parties are regarded as primary and fundamental factors in every public decision, in every public affair.

Second, they are socialized societies, which means that the

means of production, the property, is being socialized. I coined this term "socialized society" while teaching my students at the Sir George Williams University in Montreal. When I told them that Poland is a socialist society, everybody protested, because everybody knew better what a socialist society is. But when I told them that Poland is a "socialized society," they simply permitted me to explain and did not ask questions.

By socialized society I mean that it has a socialized economy, that the accumulation of private economic fortune is impossible and that every generation begins more or less at the same economic level. Every generation must make its own career on its own. Thus in a socialized economy the value of education is its tremendous impact on achieving upward mobility.

I should also like to stress that in this society all the spheres of public life are regulated in their fundamental manifestations by centralized economic, social, and political planning. This means that the sphere of private initiative of the individuals, in all those fields, is limited, and often replaced by institutionalized activity of the government or other public institutions. Further, I would like to stress that by its very nature, every socialized society is a welfare society providing free medical care, free education, rather cheap housing, leisure opportunities and recreation for working people. The stratification of society is aimed at achieving some kind of equality - reasonable equality but not perfect equality.

I do not want to enter into the problem of the extent to which it is or is not a classless or egalitarian society, but I would like to stress that the principles of stratification are completely different from Western society. Let me repeat that education is one of the most important factors determining upward mobility within this system.

Finally, I would like to stress that cultural values (the national cultural heritage, the cultural identity of the nation) play a tremendous role in Eastern Europe, much greater than in Western societies. This too has a very strong impact on the content of education.

We have to keep in mind these characteristic elements of society when trying to explain the features, the structures and the function of higher education in Eastern Europe because higher education is part of the educational system, and a part of our society's school system. It is also part of the political system. Higher education is therefore a political force and a political institution. It has been given precise political tasks. I will go into this later on.

Higher education is also part of the economic system. Very precise economic expectations are linked with its function. It has to fulfill a very precise economic goal.

I would also like to stress that higher education is part of a societal system of education although of course there are many other factors besides the school system and higher education contributing to the formation of the personality.

So much for the general traits of higher education as a part of Eastern European societies.

Eastern European School System

First let me define "education." In Eastern Europe there are two basic meanings of the term.

First, in the narrower meaning of the term, we understand education to be a process of intentional formation of the personality, according to an established personality idea. Second, in a broad sense, by education we mean the outcome of a whole societal influence on a given personality.

The school system in Eastern Europe does not differ from those in Western society as much as Western society would like. School education begins in kindergarten, at the age of three, four, or five. In Poland it begins generally at five. In Poland, only about 25 percent of the children go to kindergarten; in Bulgaria about 40 percent, and in other Eastern European countries up to 65 percent. The elementary schools begin at six or seven years of age. In Poland the age is seven. And in Poland we have 8 years of compulsory elementary education. In other countries, the Soviet Union for instance, it is 10 years. In other countries it is 7 or 9. Special schools for mentally retarded or disabled children also exist.

After elementary school, up to 70 or 80 percent of the children continue in post-elementary schools. In Poland about 75 percent of the children continue with post-elementary education. In all Eastern European countries post-elementary education is rather the same.

There are three types of education after elementary school. The first is the Lycée, or the general education secondary school. In Poland these last for four years as they do in most other Eastern European countries. In Poland about 18 to 23 percent of elementary school graduates continue their education in Lycées. Then there are technological secondary schools, lasting four or five years to train technicians, foremen and so forth. And again, about 18 to 23 percent of elementary school graduates go this way. Finally, there are schools of basic vocational training which train skilled workers. These last two to three years. About 50 to 55 percent of elementary school graduates attend these schools.

The basic organizing principle of secondary eduation is diversity. For instance, the basic vocational schools give training in about 500 types of jobs. And this vocational training is very narrowly specialized. The technological

secondary school prepares the technicians or lower supervisory and managerial personnel. And the general education school opens up the possibility of access to higher schools.

There is a principle that access must be open from every type of school. No type of school may result in a dead end. From the basic vocational school the graduates can go on to jobs as workers. Or they can go to the technological schools and from there on to the university. From the technological school they can go to jobs as technicians. Or they can go to the higher education institutions as from the general secondary school. The greatest number, about 70 percent of the candidates for higher education, come from secondary schools of general education. Furthermore, a student can take a job and go to a post-secondary school having neither the status of post-secondary vocational schools nor the status of higher education. For instance, such school training exists for nurses.

But from every secondary school the way is open to the institutions of higher education. Now how are these institutions of higher education organized?

Let me use Poland as an example as it is very like every Eastern European country. We have ten universities, including the Roman Catholic University in Lublin, the only private higher institution of education in Poland, and I believe in all of the Eastern European countries. Universities provide education in the humanities and in social sciences, including economics. In the sciences, they concentrate on the theoretical aspects.

There are 10 technological universities-polytechnics. There are 8 four-year colleges of engineering which do not give the Ph.D. degree. In addition, there are 7 agricultural colleges, 3 institutes of pedagogics, 6 teacher training

colleges, 5 higher schools in economics, 10 medical schools, 7 higher schools of music, 6 art colleges, 3 drama schools, 6 colleges of physical education, and 2 theological academies. (The Roman Catholic Theological Academy and the Christian Theological Academy for non-Catholic denominations are government-supported, but the Roman Catholic University in Lublin, which provides full university training for priests and others is a private institution.)

Functions, Goals, and Tasks

So much for the organization and the types of higher education. What are the functions, goals, and the tasks of higher education?

By *function* I mean all of the influences and effects of all activities of institutions of higher education on the life of society. There are some expected, assumed functions of higher education established by law, but these are not always the real ones. It seems to me, from a sociological point of view, that this distinction between what is expected and what is prescribed by law, and what is real, is a very important distinction.

In every statute, law, and by-law relating to higher education, it is clearly stated what the institution is for, but the impact this institution has on society is not always the same as expected. So it seems to me that this distinction between the expected and the real functions of higher education is very important.

By *goals*, I mean the expectations of higher education formulated by governments or other founding institutions. In Poland these can be put into four points.

First is the education of the desired personality type

required by the relations of production—to use the Marxian terminology—or, in other words, the type of personality required by the structure of the economy and this type of socialized society.

Next, the most important goal is the vocational and professional education of graduates required by the present state for the expected future development of the economy. I would like to stress this point: The economic functions and the economic goals of higher education are very much stressed in Eastern Europe. Governments see higher education as one of the most important factors of economic growth and development.

The third goal is preparation for participation in social and cultural life—the development of the cultural values to keep up the cultural identity of the nation. In Eastern Europe this is a very important goal.

The final goal is to assure the optimal development of human individuality, to provide the individual with the chance for self-orientation and self-education. This goal is to prepare him fully to function in all contexts of social life, not only in the economic sphere. This is, I might say, an echo of the Humboldtian idea of the fully developed creative personality.

By *tasks* of higher education I refer to the data established by the Plan for all higher education. The Plan states that in such time it shall produce such and such numbers of graduates, for every year, or for every five years. These tasks have been established for every faculty and every institution of higher education.

Access to Higher Education

Because of the function and goals of higher education very

special interest has been paid to the selection of students. Institutions of higher education in Eastern Europe do not admit all who want to study and who have the right to study. The selection of students can be divided into three stages.

The process calls for directing the flow of young people through the school system, from the time they enter primary school until graduation from secondary school of general education, or secondary professional school, giving access to higher education. In this process, passing from primary to secondary school has a fundamental importance, as the selection of a secondary school of general education improves greatly the chances of access to higher education.

About 50 percent of the graduates of primary schools, who choose the fundamental professional education, are practically excluded from the possibilty of entering higher schools. After finishing the fundamental professional schools they have no right to apply for examination for higher education, and are directed to work. However, they can try to pass the examination for professional secondary school, and from there to higher schools. Or, when working in their profession, they can join a professional school for workers, and after graduating, can try to be accepted at a higher school.

About 50 percent of the elementary school graduates who go to the basic vocational schools can go on to higher education. After graduation from basic vocational schools or technological secondary schools, they can go into higher education. Or from the job, through the system of adult education, they can get into an institution of higher education, but it is a very long process.

Most candidates are being supplied by secondary schools of general education, of which about 70 percent are girls. Therefore among the candidates for higher education, about 70 percent are girls. This is one of the indications of

advanced feminization in all the professions requiring higher education, including the technological professions. In medical institutions, for instance, about 60 percent of the students are women. Even in the agricultural profession over 40 percent of the agricultural engineers are women.

Of course this feminization of institutions of higher profession has a significant impact on the social position and function of those professions in the society.

The selection of students, the formation of the student body, is influenced by several social, cultural, economic, and political factors. We now have an entry examination to every institution of higher education. There are some candidates who are admitted without entry examination. These are the students who participated in what we called Olympiads of competition in certain sciences: mathematics, physics, chemistry. These competitions are organized on the national levels. Those who pass with distinction are admitted without examination, but they are only a very small number.

The entry examination is always organized according to the subject. The organization of the higher institution, the curricula and the programs are such that when, for instance, a candidate wants to study sociology, he must pass the examination for the students of sociology. The candidate begins the study of sociology in the first year. The curricula for this program of study is organized to give a specialization in sociology only. If the candidate wants to pass from sociology to history or to economics, he must pass additional examinations.

In addition to the entry examination, some attempts are made to use other methods of selection which more accurately predict the possible academic success of the candidates. About 20 percent of all students in higher

education drop out during the first years of study. This we regard, as do all Eastern European countries, as tremendous waste. Methods and ways are being elaborated to prevent this wasteful drop-out.

Not all who pass entry examinations can be admitted, because in some faculties or departments we have a fixed number of places. We may have from three to twelve candidates for one place.

So there is a third stage of [illegible] the post exams, and here the children of workers [illegible] peasants get additional points. In order to be admitted [illegible] dent must get some number of points, let us say 19. Twenty-five is the maximum number of points. The candidate who does not get 15 points is not admitted. The number of points depends on the quality of the examination. When someone does well on an examination, he gets 5 points; when only good, 4 points; when sufficient, 3 points, and so on.

But the children of the peasants and the workers get 3 additional points, in order to improve their chances in respect to the children coming from social classes of a higher cultural level, and with an easier access to a higher level of culture. The peasants' and workers' children have the points added to the points for their examination, which enables them to enter higher school even if the number of the points they got as a result of the examination was lower than that of the children from other social classes. This system is criticized by those who point out that the class inequalities are quickly levelled. Probably in the near future the system will be altered.

The selection system should be oriented to the selection of those candidates who really give promise of success, because admission to study is, in some ways, a guarantee for a job. To get the best people to employ, the selection system tries to get the best candidate. The shortcomings of forecasting

academic and post-academic success are well known. It is difficult to foresee the success in professional life after the studies, because a simple correlation between the success in school and success after graduation does not exist.

The curricula and program of study are unified at all universities. For instance, take students studying sociology. There are four universities in Poland training students in sociology. During the first year they all have the same program: an introductory course in sociology, an introductory course in methods of sociological research, and introductory courses in psychology, economics, and political science.

During the second year they have statistics and one semester of mathematics. In the second year they also study the history of sociology and a more advanced course in the methods of sociological research. The students also have a broad course in social psychology.

The same examinations are given for every subject, every year. Sometimes they are written; sometimes they are oral. But every course ends with an examination.

It is the same every year, in every university. The autonomy consists in the fact that the professor can teach how he wants. He has to teach the history of sociology, but it is up to him to choose the textbooks, to organize the subject, and to decide how to teach his course. The main problem of teaching is how to harmonize the societal goals with the students' goals, how to develop the type of person, the desired personality I was talking about.

Adult Education

I would like to add that there is a system of adult education

that is parallel to the school system. There are elementary schools, or the last year of elementary schools for adults who did not have the opportunity to go to elementary school. Every type of post-elementary school has branches for adults. There are basic vocational training, technological, and secondary schools of general education for adults. There are, in every institution of higher education, parallel courses for adults. There are evening courses, or extramural courses. They have the same curricula, the same program, and give the same degrees.

About 37 percent of all students in Poland's institutions of higher education are adults. And in some Eastern European countries the percentage of adults is even much higher, as for instance in the Soviet Union. There are many people who say of adult higher education that the students are not exposed to the influence of the higher institution of the university as a social milieu. They say that they do not participate in the cultural life of the university, that the relationship between teacher and student is a very loose one, and that the teachers do not have an opportunity to influence the student. On the other side, there are people who stress that the adult students are already working, that they have the opportunity to apply the knowledge they get in the institution of higher education immediately, without waiting until graduation. So they are saying that the influence of adult education on society is much stronger than the influence of the normal course of education for youth.

The Professoriate

We still believe in Eastern European countries that the quality of higher education depends on the quality of the professors. The way to become a professor is a very long one. It starts as a junior assistant, when after four or five years of study, a young, bright, graduate is chosen by the professor.

The professor is completely free to choose whom he wants as his junior assistants in his chair or his institute.

There are also some regulations for an assistant. It is expected that he will forfeit not only his educational and research functions, but also the other political and social functions that an academic teacher in Eastern Europe is supposed to do. But it all starts with the junior assistant. After one or two years, if he is good, he might be promoted to senior assistant. It depends entirely on his professor; it is an absolute dependency. After two or three years as senior assistant, he gets his Ph.D. degree and becomes a doctor. He can then become an adjunct, but is still very far away from professorship. Now, after three, four, or up to eight years he must write a thesis, and pass the examination which is called according to old German "Habilitation". After this he becomes eligible for the lowest professorial rank. After another five years and after writing another book, he can become an associate professor. And now after many years, already old, with gray hair, or completely bald, he can become a full professor. The average age of the full professor is 45 to 55. It is a very long road to a professorship.

As the retiring age for full professors is 70, we have a lot of very old professors in Eastern Europe, and this is one of the short comings of the university system.

I have to add that the standing and position of university professors is very high in all of Eastern Europe. In all sociological surveys on the professions and vocations, university professors have always been put on the top. A professor of a higher school in Eastern Europe is considered an intellectual and the creator of scientific knowledge. He is respected for his contribution in the development of knowledge and considered a part of the national heritage of culture. He is obliged to teach, but during his long way to professorship he is given more training for research than for

teaching duties. In recent years efforts have been made to prepare the assistant professors and professors for their teaching duties.

Management and Administration

The difference between the secondary education and higher education lies in this: secondary education transmits only scientific knowledge; higher education creates the knowledge and transmits it. So every university, every institution of higher education, every faculty, every chair, every institute is expected and is obliged to do some scientific research. It is now one of the basic functions of higher education to give the graduates an introduction to the use of scientific reasearch. It is a basic element of the educational equipment of the graduate of higher education. Every chair, every faculty, and every institute in our higher education receives money for research. Every university budget provides money for research.

The management of the financing of institutions of higher education is very much the same in all Eastern European countries. We have to distinguish the political management of the university and the administration. The political management is within the party. There is a department of higher education within the Central Committee of the party, and within every institution of higher education the party organization has to watch that the political line is being respected. The administration of higher education is the responsibility of the ministry of higher education. However, the medical academies are linked with the ministry of health protection, the agricultural colleges are linked with the ministry of agriculture, the maritime with the ministry of maritime affairs, and so on. Universities, technological colleges, theological academies, the training of teachers, the training of economic colleges are linked with the ministry of higher education.

The rectors (vice-chancellors) of every institution of higher education are appointed by the ministry. The deans are appointed or elected, depending on the type of school. The faculty are divided into institutes, each with its own director. Every director has two prorectors, one for teaching affairs, and another for research. Every dean has a vice-dean for teaching and another for research. The financing of higher education is secured by the state budget, prepared by the ministry of higher education, and ratified by the parliament. There are institutions of higher education which can make contracts. They have such contracts with industrial enterprises of the companies of the unions of the socialized economy. And from these they get some additional money.

The greatest problem of higher education is that institutions of higher education have set their goals higher than they can possibly achieve. The equipment, the materials, and the scientific means are not always sufficient properly to meet the very high goals set.

There are many other pressures, tensions, and conflicts between institutions of higher education and economic expectations, and between expectations and personal goals of families and students. One of the most important problems is the harmonization of the state and governmental goals and societal goals with the personal goals of the families who send their children to an institution of higher education, and students who want to achieve personal life goals. The traditional images of the role and function of higher education still influence the expectations of students and their families. But the traditional images are irrelevant to contemporary reality.

A most important problem is the use and proper employment of graduates. There are some analysts of higher education who say that the institutions of higher education have become a machine running idle, with about 20 percent

of drop-outs during the first years of study, and up to 35 percent of graduates employed in ways not related to their professional education.

Higher education is not meeting the principal goals it has been set up to meet. We are now having full discussions, and a report on the complete reform of the educational system has been prepared.

International Council for Educational Development

The International Council for Educational Development (ICED) is an international non-profit association of persons with a common concern for the future of education and its role in social and economic development.

ICED's three major interests are strategies for educational development; the modernization and management of systems of higher education; and the international programs and responsibilities of higher education. In each area, ICED's purposes are to identify and analyze major educational problems shared by a number of countries, to generate policy recommendations, and to provide consultation, on request, to international and national organizations.

ICED's activities are directed by James A. Perkins, chief executive officer and chairman of an international board. Philip H. Coombs is vice chairman. The headquarters office is in New York City.

The main support for ICED to date has come from the Ford Foundation, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, UNICEF, and the Clark Foundation. Twelve national and international agencies are supporting ICED's 18-month study on Higher Education for Development.

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